1:Evans-Pritchard E-4 (no date) 1948
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particular, ceremonial services at the king's investiture, the building of huts at Fashoda, which is both the royal capital and the cult centre of Nyikang, and the upkeep of Nyikang's other shrines and those of past kings. These shrines are widely distributed throughout the country so that every section of it participates in the cult of Nyikang, who is, it must be borne in mind, not only the semi-divine hero of Shilluk mythology but also the king at every period of their history. Indeed, the shrines of Nyikang, what Professor Seligman calls his cenotaphs, are indistinguishable from the tomb-shrines of dead kings and they have the same ceremonial functions in the life of the people: in the rain-making ceremonies, at harvest time, and in times of sickness and pestilence.[1] The religion and cosmogony of the Shilluk are bound up with the political system through the identification of Nyikang with the king. The kingship stands at the centre of Shilluk moral values.

We can only understand the place of the kingship in Shilluk society when we realize that it is not the individual at any time reigning who is king, but

[1] Prof. C. G. Seligman, 'The Cult of Nyakang and the Divine Kings of the Shilluk', *Report of the Wellcome Tropical Research Laboratories* (1911), pp. 221 and 225.

Nyikang who is the medium between man and God (*Juok*) and is believed in some way to participate in God as he does in the king. 'Nyikang is the *reth* but the *reth* is not Nyikang.'[1] The participation of Nyikang in the king raises the kingship to a plane above all sectional interests, whether local or of descent. All the Shilluk share in the kingship, however their loyalties may pull them apart in other matters, because in Nyikang are centred all those interests which are common to all the people: success in war against foreigners and the fertility and health of men, cattle, crops, and of those wild beasts which are of service to man. Professor Westermann tells us that 'everything they value most in their national and private life, has its origin in him'.[2] Mr Howell and Mr Thomson tell us that when a king dies the Shilluk say '*piny bugon*', 'there is no land'[3]—the centre of the Shilluks' world has fallen out. It is restored by the investiture of a new king, for though kings may perish the kingship, that is Nyikang, endures. Mr Oyler tells us: 'They say that if Nikawng should die, the whole Shilluk race would perish.'[4]

[1] Howell and Thomson, *op. cit.* p. 8. [2] *Op. cit.* p. xliii.
[3] Howell and Thomson, *op. cit.* p. 18.
[4] Rev. D. S. Oyler, 'Nikawng and the Shilluk Migration', *S.N. and R.* (1918), p. 115.

2:Seligman & Seligman E-5 (1909-1910) 1912
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CHAPTER III

SHILLUK (Contd.): OTHER SHILLUK-SPEAKING TRIBES

RELIGION

There are genuine three important and clearly defined elements in the religion of the Shilluk, viz. :—

1. The recognition and somewhat limited worship of a god, Juok.
2. The cult of Nyakang and the dead kings of the Shilluk (ultimately reducible to the cult of Nyakang, since he is incarnate in every king).
3. The cult of ancestor spirits other than that of Nyakang.

We shall discuss these in the above order, but must first point out that besides these outstanding features of his religion the Shilluk believes in various more or less anthropomorphic but non-human beings dwelling in bush and river, the most important of these being the river-people, with whom are associated herds of supernatural river-cattle.

The word *juok*, or some dialectical modification, occurs in all the Nilotic languages as well as in some others, e.g. Lotuko. It always connotes something in the nature of god, spirit, or ghost, but its political meaning in one language may be quite different from that in a neighbouring tongue, while identical meanings in two languages may have very different values since a particular connotation of the word common to two peoples may refer either to an important or to an entirely subsidiary element in their religious beliefs.[1]

Juok is formless and invisible, and, like the air, is everywhere at once. He is far above Nyakang (in whose cult the Shilluk religion centres) and men alike; nevertheless it is principally through Nyakang that men approach him, performing the sacrifices to Nyakang which cause him to move Juok to send rain. There are, however, prayers to Juok, and the word Juok occurs in many greetings, e.g. *Yomiri*

[1] These points may be conveniently illustrated by comparing Shilluk, Dinka, and Anuak. In Shilluk, Juok though associated with the firmament is, apart from Nyakang, of comparatively little practical importance in daily life; in the Dinka *jok* are the mighty dead, appealed to on almost every occasion of difficulty or danger, while among both Shilluk and Anuak there are certain spirits of the bush known as *juok* also who, greatly feared among the Anuak, are little regarded by the Shilluk. For an excellent discussion of the significance of the word *juok* see Hofmayr, *op. cit.*, 183-208.

2:Seligman & Seligman E-5 (1909-1910) 1932
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a chthonic aspect. Juok is almost otiose so far as the daily life of the Shilluk is concerned, assistance being generally sought from Nyakang, whose flight from the land of Dimo in the Bahr el Ghazal to become the founder and first king of the Shilluk nation we have already recorded.

Mr. Heasty writes to us of the very numerous meanings attached to the word *juok* in varying senses at different times :—

> "He appears to be one, and yet he seems to be a plurality as well, and the native himself is puzzled. . . . He will say there is but *one juok*, and then he will say of one who has been extremely fortunate that his *juok* is very good, while he speaks of another who is less fortunate as having a bad or angry *juok*. The foreigner is spoken of as *juok* because of the marvellous things he does. He flies through the air, or makes a machine that talks, so he is a *juok*. A badly wounded animal that is lost in the grass is *juok*, because it walked off dead and could not be found. . . . *Juok* is the creator of mankind, and the universe . . . but anything that the Shilluk cannot understand is *juok*."

Apart from his formal cult, Nyakang is the hero or subject of an enormous amount of folklore, and Hofmayr gives a list of twenty-five epithets or synonyms.[1] Yet, although he is a culture hero, at once the founder of the nation and the present day ideal of the Shilluk, we hold that Nyakang is no mythical figure projected on an historical background, but an historical ruler whose deeds and sayings—apart from obviously mythical elements—as enshrined in Shilluk legend and belief do constitute a record of actual happenings. Regarding the Shilluk attitude to Nyakang, we have no doubt that in spite of the saurian element in his ancestry (pp. 85–6) the majority of Shilluk think of Nyakang as a divine or semi-divine being, human in form and physical qualities, though, unlike his recent successors, he did not die but disappeared in a great storm of wind during a festival held at Akurwa; moreover, in spite of the fact that the objects kept in his shrines are fit for the use only of a creature with a human body, we believe that so many of his worshippers, including some at least of his priests, Nyakang is essentially a spiritual being, who manifests himself to humanity by way of incarnation or sometimes (as in dreams) as a bright light. We also recognize that in writing of the "spirit of Nyakang", as we frequently shall in this chapter, we are using the terminology of the European rather than of the African, who simply says "Nyakang", our reasons for not following the latter being that such usage leads to an ambiguity in view of the many

[1] Op. cit., p. 44

2:Seligman & Seligman E-5 (1909-1910) 1932
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of Nyakang, if Nyakang has appeared, or to the grave shrine of the appropriate king if the dreamer has seen one of the later Shilluk kings. The bullock is killed and the cow added to the herd belonging to the shrine.

It is usual for the harvest ceremony (already alluded to on p. 80) to be performed at the royal grave shrines as well as at the shrines of Nyakang, though it is recognized that this is not absolutely necessary. Again, each king soon after his installation sends or should send presents to the grave shrines of his predecessors, treating these in the same way as he treats the shrines of Nyakang, though the presents need not be so lavish. So, too, sick folk send animals to be sacrificed as offerings at the shrines of their kings, just as they do to the shrines of Nyakang.

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At this point it will be convenient to anticipate the conclusions to which the next few pages will lead, and point out that the actual working religion of the Shilluk is the cult of Nyakang, depending upon the acceptance of the following beliefs: (1) the immanence in each king (*reth*) of Nyakang, (2) the conviction that the king must not be allowed to become ill or senile, lest with his diminishing vigour the cattle should sicken and fail to bear their increase, the crops should wither in the fields, and men, stricken with disease, should die in ever increasing numbers. It follows that the *reth* of the Shilluk must be numbered among those rulers whom Sir James Frazer has called "*divine kings*", and though, as in many instances in other countries, every precaution is taken against accidental death, the Shilluk kings are (or were) killed in order to avoid those disasters which their senescence was thought to bring upon the state.

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Although there is no doubt that the kings of the Shilluk were killed ceremonially when they began to show signs of old age or ill-health, it is extremely difficult to ascertain exactly what was done, and a good deal of Shilluk folklore is enshrined in the accounts commonly given of the killing of the *reth*. According to these, any royal son (*nyireth*) had the right to attempt to kill the king, and if successful to reign in his stead. The killing could only take place

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at night, for during the day the king would be surrounded by his friends and bodyguard and no aspiring successor would have the least chance of harming him. At night the king's position was very different; alone in his enclosure with his wives, and with no men to protect him except a few herdsmen whose huts were situated at a little distance, he was represented as passing the night in constant

2:Seligman & Seligman E-5 (1909-1910) 1932
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693 796 homestead, and is speared by an *orwo* after the king has marked it with a spear, or perhaps made passes over it, the beast being dragged away to fall probably outside the shrine of Nyakang.

This brings the installation proper to an end, and the king, waited on by the *nyo kwor*, enters the homestead, where he should remain [716] some ten days in solemn communion with Nyakang whose spirit he now incarnates.

On the tenth night the king is taken by the *orwo* to his rebuilt "palace" on the mound Anzuwic, and lives there for a month in retirement. When he comes down from the mound there is again a sham fight, in which he vanquishes his opponent, and he is now the acknowledged king.[1] A beast is sacrificed, and the chiefs present make oration on the rights and duties of the ruler, each emphasizing his words by brandishing his spear and thrusting it into the ground at the close of his speech. The king replies, promises to be a just ruler, to punish wrong and to protect the weak, and dismisses his people after exhorting them to remain true to Nyakang and to their ancient customs.

The three newly built huts which were occupied by the king are broken down (perhaps by the *orwo*) and their fragments thrown into the river.

We believe that the installation of a new *reth* generally takes place about the middle of the dry season. It was said that the Akurwa party and "Nyakang" stay at Fashoda for some time, until about the beginning of the rains. On leaving Fashoda a bullock is sacrificed, and a sheep is killed before crossing every khor on the way back. On arriving at Akurwa four or five of the cattle presented by the *reth* are sacrificed, and the bones thrown into the river.

● 771 The third element in the Shilluk religion is the cult of ancestors (other than those of the royal family). We confess that we feel unable to set this forth in due proportion and perspective. For [771] while it is certainly true to say that the ancestral cult is overshadowed by the cult of Nyakang, and that if it ever existed in any such form and degree as among the Dinka it is now but a remnant of what it [716] once was, yet we are convinced that there is very much more feeling for and fear of dead ancestors than appears on the surface. We have

[1] Pepti, the present king, left his temporary homestead on the third night and came down from his palace on the mound the next morning. For a rather confused account of what happened then, given to Mr. Munro by an Egyptian officer—not apparently himself an eye-witness—see Mr. Munro's article (our Appendix) already quoted.

2:Seligman & Seligman E-5 (1909-1910) 1932
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already referred to *pun Juok* (p. 75), the country of the dead, to be reached after long wandering in the bush, but there is also a chthonic element in Shilluk ancestor worship; the spirit persists in or round the grave and may harm its living relatives, *e.g.* the death of a missionary's wife shortly after that of her husband was attributed to the ghost of the latter, while Hofmayr quotes a remark of the chief Yaugjok to the effect that evil comes on man from below.[1] Again, the Shilluk undoubtedly fear the *con*, the malevolent elements that persist after the death of one who has died in hatred of friends or relatives, though here again the belief does not seem to bulk as largely as among the Acholi.

Offerings and sacrifice may be made to ancestors, but in our limited experience we have met with no instance that could certainly be dissociated from the cult of the royal ancestors or in which the ancestral spirits were not confused with or associated with Juok. It is true that Hofmayr describes offerings to ancestors[2] but his descriptions, taken for the most part from notes of colleagues, are not very convincing, as there is nothing to show that the cult of Nyakang or his descendants was specifically excluded. On the other hand he cites two short chants[3] which may be regarded as evidence of prayer to the ancestors:—

ere kwajo nyagwa
"The people mourn their mothers (ancestors)."

ere kwajo ringwa
"The people mourn their people (their dead)."

A hæmorrhage followed by sudden death is called "the spears of the dead", i.e. the victim has been stabbed by a ghostly weapon, but the Shilluk expression, *nang dieng pa Juok*, seems to bring Juok into the matter. A more definite relation to ancestral spirits is seen in a note by Batrobner, quoted by Hofmayr,[4] to the effect that warriors obtained the services of an *ajuago* to invoke their ancestors, that the spirits of the slain may be harmless. A sheep is killed and part of the viscera placed in a pot and buried as an offering to those in the underworld.[5]

[1] Op. cit., 190. [2] Op. cit., 109. [3] Op. cit., 190. [4] Loc. cit.
[5] Other records that every Shilluk "also an offering of the first fruits to the grave of an ancestor, usually the father. . . . The grain is made into a sort of batter and poured out on the grave. The man then says that he has given his father a meal." ("Hilcoxing's place in the Shilluk Religion", *J.R.A.I.*, 1908, 268). But in another passage Oyler clearly shows an association of the ancestral spirits with Juok (for we assume that "God" is a translation of "Juok"): ". . . When prayer is to be offered to the spirit of a dead person, a female sheep is brought to the grave. If the person making the prayer is not the son of the

3:Westermann E-5 (1910) 1912 F213 Shilluk F213

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enters. Around our house they went in a regular manœuvre, and forming in a line again in front of the house for another charge.

This they repeated a number of times. Then a crowd of women, who had followed their husbands and swordsmen to battle, acted the part of fire, only to be overcome by the brave warriors and driven back. This part was very amusing. One old body with great bravery snatched out and charged, using her pipe as her weapon. The men were a bit rough in driving her back, and she was evidently afraid her dear pipe would come to grief, as she took it inside our house and when next we saw her she was in the think of a fray with a long wand as her weapon of offence and defence".]

The dry season is also the time for travelling. Relatives pay mutual visits, and marriageable young men go to the Nuers and Dinkas with spears, wire, cattle, and dura, which they exchange for ebony and cattle.

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IV. RELIGION.

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In the religion of the Shilluks three components are clearly distinguishable: 1. *Jwok (Juok)* or God; 2. *Nyikang (Nyikaŋ)*, the progenitor and national hero of the Shilluks; 3. *ajwago (ajwaŋo)*, the witch doctor or sorcerer. These three do not exist separate from each other, but have many relations amongst one another. There are still other forms of religious worship, but they are not so prominent as the three mentioned.

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"*Jwok (Juok)* is a supreme being, residing above". Whether he is regarded as creator is not sure. According to the sayings of some natives he surely is, but it seems probable that this belief, if there is such a one, is young, and must be traced back to Mohammedan or Christian influences. — On certain occasions an ox is killed as a sacrifice to *Jwok*, though this is done more frequently to *Nyikang*; prayers are also offered to *Jwok*, but according to my information, they have only one prayer to *Jwok* (for which vide page 171), while to *Nyikang* there are many. "Praying" to *Jwok* is expressed by a different word from that which serves for designating a prayer to *Nyikang*; the first is *lieng* "to pray"; its original meaning is probably: to conjure. In praying to *Nyikang* loosely "to ask for, to beg" is used. While the prayers to *Nyikang* are sung, and accompanied by dances, that one to *Jwok* is only spoken, not sung, and not accompanied by dancing. *Jwok* has no visible symbols or temples, nor are the prayers to him offered by a priest or sorcerer, but by the chief or village-elder.

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In the heart and mind of the Shilluk *Jwok* does not possess a deep-rooted rank. In some way they do attribute good and evil to him, and chiefly the

3:Westermann E-6 (1910) 1912 F223 Shilluk F223

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a man by witchcraft, to prevent rain, and to spoil the cattle to be known. — There exist two kinds of sorcerers, the one whose functions are just mentioned, who plays an important and mostly fraudulent rôle in public life and the official religion of the community, and another one whose doings are secret and who works for individual. If this latter is convicted of his evil doings, he may be severely fined, or even sentenced to death. — Besides these the word *jal pyt* "man of medicine" is sometimes used, whether this is a synonym to *ajwiljo*, or whether it designates still a third class of "witch"-, or ordinary "doctor", I do not know.

When possessed by a spirit (or by *Juok*?) the sorcerers become ecstatic; the same seems to be the case with a newly elected king; here it seems to be the spirit of Nyikang, which falls on his followers, vide page 149. ECSTASY 781

The races contain many mythological tales and allusions, which may in former times have formed part of the strictly religious belief of the people, but exist now merely as historical traditions, without having any active meaning to the present generation; this domain of their mental life is, however, not sufficiently known as yet to allow a decisive judgement. A reminiscence of sun-service is evident from §§, page 166. The Nile and Sobat are populated by water-people, who in figure are partly like men, partly like crocodiles or fish. They had, in the past, many intercourse with men. — According to some older writers the spirits of the Nile are worshipped. They have their own cattle-herds, which live with them in and on the banks of the Nile. They often dive up from the water, chiefly in misty weather. When a cow is fished out of the river, it is placed under the protection of the Nile-spirits and the sun-god[1]. MYTHOLOGY 973

The Shilluks have two expressions which may be translated by "soul" or "spirit" of a living person: *wei* and *ojoj*; *wei* means "breath", and is the life-giving fact.; in man; the meaning of *ojoj* is "shadow" of a man, or "image", as seen when looking into clear, still water. — The spirit of a dead person is called *anyiq*; the word is derived from *ajyq* to kill; *anyiq* probably means "one who kills", or "who is killed". The *anyiq* is feared. SOUL, SPIRIT 974

On the abode of deceased persons the Shilluks have but vague ideas; in one of the texts the dead are called "the people of the village of God", *jö pë Juok*. Whether they have a general belief in a life after death, is not known. ABODE OF THE DECEASED 975

Islam does up to now not find much sympathy with the Shilluks. They prefer their own religion to that of foreigners. Only a few people who have for a longer time lived in close touch with Mohammedans, chiefly those who have served as soldiers, adopt the religion of Mohammed, or at least wear Mohammedan amulets beside their own charms. It is admirable that these people, Shilluks, Dinkas Anywaks, and Nuers, though having lived for centuries side ISLAM 977 977 947

[1] This doubtlessly relates to the cave of Nyikang, vide the preceding.

3:Westermann E-5 (1910) 1912 F223 Shilluk F223

by side with Arabs and other Mohammedan people, should have preserved their own heathen form of worship, and should, with a few exceptions, look down rather with contempt on the religion of the foreigners. Partly this is explained by their conservativeness and self-confidence, and partly by the fact that their intercourse with Mohammedans was almost exclusively hostile. Whether now that the Pax Britannica makes slave-hunting and raiding impossible and new ideas slowly penetrate the country, Islam will make greater progress, the future will show. A gradual peaceful conquest of the country by Islam is not improbable, because civilization, as it comes to these people, wears no compulsory Islamic stamp.

On Christian Mission work among the Shilluks vide the end of Introduction.

V. POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS.

RESIDENCE OF THE KING

The Shilluks are the only people of the Sudan who have a Kingdom[1]. The king resides at Fashoda. His residence consists in a large number of huts for himself, his numerous wives and other members of his family and for guests. He possesses large herds of cattle, goats and sheep. When a person of some respect pays him a visit, the king presents him with an ox. — The royal robe consists in a leopard skin. They have also a coronation robe of leopard skin and ostrich feathers, which has been handed down from many generations. The present king has a gorgeous red robe presented by the governor, which he wears on occasions when he meets the higher English officials.

ELECTION

The kingdom of the Shilluks is hereditary in so far as the king must always be a member of the royal family, that is, of the descendants of Dyikang, and only a person whose father has been a king, may be elected. There are three houses of the royal family, and the king is elected from each of these royal branches in turn. If there are several brothers in the branch whose turn it is to have the kingship, upon the death of the king one of these brothers will be elected. But in case there is no vacancy during the life of these three brothers, then the sons of the oldest will be in line for the throne.

Fadjyt is the present king. He is of the house of Kwaj Kor. When he dies, the kingship will pass to the house of *Tij*; at the death of the king from the house of *Tij* it will be the turn of the house of *Nadjak*. Thence it will return to the house of Kwaj Kor, but not to a son of *Fadjyt*, but to one of the king's brothers. When it has gone around the circle again, it will be the turn of a son of *Fadjyt*. There seem to be two branches of each house, so that when a king dies, it will be the turn of his oldest son to become king, after five kings have reigned and died. There have been other royal houses, but they have lost their

[1] "king" is in Shilluk *rīŋ* or *ryŋ*; in other literature the word "reader" is given as the Shilluk name for king. By Europeans the king is commonly called *mek*, which is a contraction of the Arab *malik*.

would marry women from lineage A as this would prevent the correct working of the relationship of avoidance and would confuse the situation. Each lineage therefore develops a tendency to marry women of some other specific lineage,(1) but this is a traditional connection only and not compulsory.

In addition to the ordinary ore relationship between two lineages it is dangerous for a man to have sexual relations with a member of a lineage which is ore in the second degree. B, C and D may have an ore relationship, through customary intermarriage, with other lineages, E, F, G and H. If a man of lineage A seduced a girl of lineage E then all the men of lineage B would be offended, since they regard marriage with girls of E as their prerogative, and there is an ore relationship between the two lineages as there is through A and B. Senile sickness would result from the offence in the same way as if a man had relations with a woman who was a blood relation.

Terminology

Pumphrey gives a list of Shilluk kinship terms,(2) among which may be noted the absence of any single word for brother, such a kinsman being described as father's son or mother's son. The Shilluk kinship terms used to describe members of the immediate family are extended to others of the same generation, and from this descriptive terminology a classificatory system is formed.

RITUAL AND OTHER CULTURAL FEATURES

There are three major aspects of Shilluk belief and ritual: the recognition and worship of Juok, the cult of Nyikang and the kings in whom he has been reincarnated, and the cult of the ancestral spirits. In addition there are less important beliefs such as the belief in the spirits of the bush and river.

JUOK

The concept of Juok is found in many of the Nilotic tribal groups although beliefs concerning it vary. Among the Shilluk Juok refers to a spirit which is universal, formless and invisible like the air. Juok is above Nyikang and men though he is approached principally through Nyikang. The Shilluk perform sacrifices to Nyikang which cause him to move Juok to send rain, to prevent misfortune, remove sickness and so forth. Juok is so linked to Nyikang that he is seldom approached in prayer without mention of the latter as intercessor. Juok is vaguely associated with the firmament and is recognised as creator though he is believed to show little interest in men owing to his greatness which is so far above them.

Hofmayr(3) states that the Shilluk put adjectives to the word Juok in order to bring out one or other of his attributes:

(1) Pumphrey, *S.N.R.*, 1941, Vol.XXIV, p.30. (2) *Ibid.*, pp.27-9.
(3) Hofmayr, *Die Schilluk*, 1925, pp.186-7 and p.193.

made on all times of stress and misfortune. Everything round a shrine is sacred, especially trees - they are particularly rare in Shillukland in any case.

Certain Shilluk kings, particular incarnations of Nyikang, tend to be identified with particular species of animals. If such an animal approaches the shrine without signs of fear, it is assumed to be the form in which Nyikang appears, and a sacrifice is offered at the shrine. Almost any unusual behaviour on the part of an animal would lead the Shilluk to look on it as a temporary incarnation of Nyikang. Nyikang's mother, Nikaiwo, is reputed to have been a crocodile and is believed to live in the river in that form. A sacrifice is made to her by throwing a live sheep into the river. The crocodile is generally spared even though these creatures are a danger in river crossings.

There is a limited cult of the Dinka spirit Dengdit, and also a belief in the spirits of the bush and river.

The cult of the ancestors

Beliefs concerning the ancestral spirits are vague. Reference is made to *pun jwok*, 'the country of the dead', which is reached by the spirit after long wandering through the bush, but it is also believed that the spirit persists in or around the grave. Offerings and sacrifices are made to the ancestral spirits by the head of a household or local lineage on behalf of the descendants. If there is sickness or misfortune or the possibility of danger, a person will pray to his ancestors and make an animal sacrifice to propitiate them.

The ancestral cult seems, however, to be overshadowed by the national cult of Nyikang and the royal ancestors.

TOTEMIC BELIEFS

Seligman suggests that Shilluk totemism may have been derived from the Dinka because it seems so slight and unimportant. According to Hofmayr and Westermann the clans appear to have totems and some clans derive themselves from an animal or fish which Nyikang took and turned into people in order to populate the country. Hofmayr states that totem animals are often killed but it is considered wrong to eat them.(1) Most totems are animals but a few are plants. Children inherit their totems from their fathers; a woman keeps hers even when she is married.(2)

MAGICAL PRACTICES

The Rainmaker (*Ajwogo*)

Ajwogo means 'man of luck'. Such people are regarded as possessing certain magical powers which they use for the good of the community. People go to them when they are in need of help and pay them for their assistance. The powers of the *ajwogo* are believed to be due to their

(1) Hofmayr, *Die Schilluk*, 1925, p.235.
(2) *Ibid.*

S:Lienhardt E-4 (no date) 1954 F223 Shilluk F223

THE SHILLUK OF THE UPPER NILE

By GODFREY LIENHARDT

This essay is based primarily on literary sources,[1] which contain unusually full references to the religious and cosmological ideas of the Shilluk. In places, I have reinterpreted earlier writings on the Shilluk in the light of my own knowledge of the related Dinka, and of other Nilotic studies. The concepts of these Nilotic peoples are alike in many ways, and the Shilluk and Dinka have for long been considered as related, from the point of view of anthropological theory, by the presence among them both of different forms of the institution of 'divine kingship', studied by Frazer and Seligman.[2] Upon this institution much of their interpretation of the universe and of their own place in it depend.

Lack of definition and dogma in their religion and cosmology makes it possible for Nilotic peoples to accept many different versions of their mythology and history, and also permits some syncretism of belief. I do not consider here speculations about the possible influences of ancient Egypt, the Funj, Islam, or the early monophysite Christianity of the Sudan, on Shilluk belief.[3] It is, in fact, remarkable that contact with foreign peoples and ideas, over a long period, should have left so little mark on Shilluk thought. Some of the stories which Hofmayr[4] attributes to Christian influence are widely known among other Nilotic peoples and elsewhere, in places further removed from probable contact with Christianity. Lack of formal definition of beliefs and notions about the universe also makes the study of Shilluk cosmology necessarily a study based on inferences from myths, hymns, and other texts, collected piecemeal from informants, none of whom can speak with any final authority. It is clear that Shilluk cosmology is not present to the mind of any one Shilluk as a single, orthodox system, abstracted from the narrative flow and imaginative detail of myth. Even one man may tell slightly different versions of the same story,[5] for the telling is

[1] References throughout are to the Shilluk bibliography appended, the dates being the dates of the publications cited. Some of the sources contain many texts in the Shilluk language, and where these are translated into a language other than English, I have given an English version after examining the Shilluk text. I should like to thank all writers on the Shilluk, upon whose observations this summary and representation entirely depend. Their publications, however, are not all easily accessible, nor are they specifically concerned with the analysis of the Shilluk ideas here studied. This must be my excuse for writing about a people of great ethnological interest and importance, who have already been described in detail by writers who have known them well.

[2] J. G. Frazer, 1911. C. G. Seligman, 1911, C. G. and B. Z. Seligman, 1932.

[3] Discussion of Shilluk contacts with some of these will be found in W. Hofmayr, 1925, and D. Westermann, 1912. For general cultural and conceptual similarities between ancient Egypt and negro Africa, the reader may be referred to C. G. Seligman, 1934, and H. Frankfort, 1948, among others.

[4] 1925, pp. 135–6, the stories of a fall of man, and of a woman's bearing a god.

[5] D. R. Oyler, 1918 (1).

[Cp. 138]

S:Lienhardt E-4 (no date) 1954. FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

a third, a spiritual or ideal, dimension. To put this in another way, the Shilluk question suggests that what is material has another, non-material, dimension, and we are told that *juok* is "present to a greater or lesser degree in all things".[1] Although *juok*, as the first principle, is the ultimate explanation for everything, the notion of *juok* seems to be particularly used to account for such phenomena as elude explanation in less abstract terms. It is a necessary logical concept for the Shilluk. Seligman quotes Dr. Hussey as saying of *juok* that 'he appears to be one, and yet seems to be a plurality as well . . . anything the Shilluk cannot understand is *juok*'.[2] That is, what the Shilluk cannot otherwise account for, they account for by this concept. So, for example, the creation of the world and of life is the work of *juok*, and he may also be an explanation for sickness and death. The presence and powers of the foreigners are explained with reference to *juok*, for those who are specially gifted are supposed to be so by virtue of the stronger flow, in them, of the being which created and animates the universe. *Juok*, therefore, is the support of Nyikang and the Shilluk kings. Since they represent, for the Shilluk, the order of the society and the world in which they live, and since *juok* has its place in that order, it is to be expected that for them Nyikang should also be an indication of the nature of God. So, in what Hofmayr says is the oldest Shilluk song, Nyikang is represented as speaking for God 'thus God says'.[3] This association between God and Nyikang is, of course, what has led to the anthropological study of Nyikang and his successors as 'divine kings'. God and Nyikang are two terms of Shilluk thought which cannot be reduced to any third term, but co-exist and participate in each other.

Relation of Nyikang to God

Examples of this are numerous. It is said that there are few direct appeals to God, and that Nyikang is usually invoked as an intermediary. Westermann quotes a prayer which 'is said to be the only prayer to *juok*', and says that the Shilluk were taught it by Nyikang. This explanation was, presumably, given him by a Shilluk, and is an example of their interpretation of God by Nyikang already mentioned. Part of the prayer runs:

There is no one above thee, thou God. Thou becamest the grandfather of Nyikango; it is thou (Nyikango) who walkest with God; thou becamest the grandfather (of man), and thy son Dak. If famine comes, is it not given by thee? So as this cow stands here, is it not thou: if she dies, does her blood not go to thee? Thou God, and thou who becamest Nyikango, and thy son Dak! But the soul (of man), is it not thine own? It is thou who liftest up (the sick).[4]

The association between Nyikang and God in this prayer is so close that it is sometimes difficult to know which is addressed. Since the Shilluk myth and tradition tell them much more about the nature of Nyikang, who is a man, than about the nature of God, who is not, it is to be expected that they

[1] Howell and Thomson, 1946, p. 8.
[2] C. G. Seligman, 1932, p. 76.
[3] Hofmayr, 1925, p. 7.
[4] Westermann, 1912, p. 171.

11: Oyler M-5 (ca. 1918)1919 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

THE SHILLUK'S BELIEF IN THE EVIL EYE.

THE EVIL MEDICINE MAN.

BY REV. D. S. OYLER.

I. — THE SHILLUK'S BELIEF IN THE EVIL EYE.

To the animistic mind of the Shilluk, the occult powers are always near, and the fact that they can not be seen makes them none the less real. Around, about him everywhere are the spirits, and daily he comes in contact with people, who are the possessors of occult powers. They recognize five classes of people, who are in possession of hidden powers. They are:

The servants of the king, that is the people in whom is the spirit of one of the kings;
The beneficent medicine men or witch-doctors;
The malignant medicine men or witch-doctors;
The people with the power of the evil eye, and
The people possessed of the evil spirit.

Some say that the class of people with the power to cast the evil eye receive their power from the evil medicine men, and would class them together, but very few make that classification. However, in talking about the evil eye, it always brings up the subject of the malignant medicine men. The powers claimed for the two classes are very similar.

Many say, with good reason, that the people possessed of the evil spirit should not be so called, but that their affliction is merely a disease. We would call it insanity.

These articles do not exhaust the subjects, but a little has been gleaned from the contradictory tales of the Shilluks. Often the ideas of the natives

28: Cyler M-5 (ca. 1918) 1918 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

they made answer. The spirit then said: «I was eaten by lions, the lions were two, had the lion been one I would not have been eaten, for you know me, that I am strong». The people replied: «We know that you are strong». He continued: «I am sorry for my mother only». At that she wept. They beat the drum, and he said «I return». His brother alone doubted, and said: «My spirit is strong, my brother lives». He was chided with unbelief. The next morning they buried a wooden effigy of Nkat, and had a mourning dance for him. In the midst of the dance he returned, and wanted to know who had died that they were mourning. The dance was stopped. The medium was humiliated, and refused to attempt to work in other cases.

Such cases as the foregoing are usually treated by the women. The more servants of the king treat the river sickness. The patient with two sheep is taken to the river. The sheep must be male and female. The head of the male is put under the water. It is then taken out, and its four feet tied together, with its head between the front feet. The healer then puts it into the river, and as it is carried off by the current it takes the sickness with it. The female sheep is the fee of the healer. They then go to the village and kill a sheep for a feast.

When a servant of a king begs he says: «The king is begging you». and if his requests are modest they are granted.

In death the servants of the king are honoured by the same kind of burial as is accorded to a chief.

They look upon it as a form of spirit possession. The spirit is good, or at least not as malignant as some of the other spirits that may take possession of a person. A failure in no way lessens their power, as the people are sure that some other healer would have been successful. While a successful cure brings great glory to the healer.

This class typifies a longing of the native mind. They are seeking some power to bridge the gulf between the finite and infinite. The power that belongs to God is to pass to the king, and then by his spirit to be given to his servant, who is to use it for the good of the people.

The mediums prey upon the people. Often they seem to be sincere in the belief that they have the power claimed, though just as often they seem to realize that they are deceiving the people.

29:Dempsey M-S (1940-1954) 1955
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struggling at each step to free oneself from the clinging mud underneath. Long after the rains have ceased the swamp remains, only drying up gradually under the heat of the sun and through drainage into the river, until by mid-December the moisture has all been drawn from the earth, and the bright green grass which has covered it during the rains begins to turn yellow and wither.

If my new home was no Eden of beauty, neither was it one free from labour and toil. The territory covered by the mission is, I discovered, quite large. In length it is about 70 miles, extending from Kaka, 55 miles to the north, to a point 15 miles south of Detwok; inland it stretches 15 miles from the river where the Shilluk villages farthest from the river are to be found. The 'parish' thus comprises roughly an area of 1,050 square miles and it is a formidable task for two priests to administer it, especially as the most speedy means of transport available is the push bicycle. However, most of the Christians, who at that time were by no means numerous, lived in the villages near the mission, and large areas were without habitation of any kind, so that the task of parochial visitation did not prove as onerous as it might at first appear. The Shilluk are inveterate wanderers and often drift from the villages in which they were born and baptized as far north as Kaka, or inland to the limits of inhabited country. There they will remain for years quite out of touch with the mission and Christian influence, for rarely if ever do they come in to hear Mass and receive the Sacraments. With all the good will in the world it is impossible for two priests, one with the many affairs of the mission to attend to and the other fully occupied in the school, to keep track of these nomads and follow them in their wanderings. But their heavenly mother, Mary, does not forget them at the hour of their death, and many is the time that a message from a vigilant catechist, or word brought casually by a passing traveller, or, more often than not, a request for a burial cloth from the pagan relatives of the dying Christian sends the priest post-haste a journey of 15 or 20 miles, in the dry season by bicycle, in the rains on foot, to bring the